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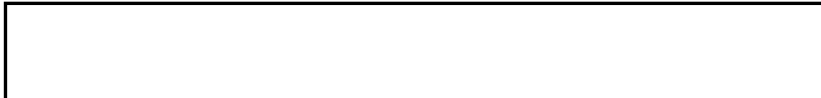
# Intelligence Memorandum

*French Arms Sales to Libya  
and Their Impact on the Middle East*

State Dept. review completed

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14 January 1970  
No. 0466/70



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
14 January 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: French Arms Sales to Libya and Their  
Impact on the Middle East

Summary

There is little doubt that France intends to utilize at least some portions of Wheelus and El Adem air bases, now scheduled to be evacuated by the US and UK by 30 June 1970, for the technical training of Libyan personnel as part of a military aid deal. The French, however, have stated that they have no intention of "taking over" these bases and of running them as French bases in the same way the US ran Wheelus. Nevertheless, a sizable French mission of instructors and technicians is likely to be sent to Libya to train Libyan pilots to fly the Mirages that France intends to sell to Libya.

The press reported on 10 January that a contract had been signed for 50 Mirage fighter bombers, and no French officials have publicly denied these stories.

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French Foreign Minister Schumann said on 6 January that any contract would contain specific provisions restricting the sale of the aircraft to, or their stationing in, countries other than Libya. It is far from certain, however, that these clauses will be effective in banning the transfer or movement of the aircraft,

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even though there is no evidence that the Arabs now plan actually to equip Egyptian or other Arab military forces with arms purchased by Libya from France. At this time it seems unlikely that a French-Libyan deal would have any significant impact on the balance of Middle East military power over the next few years. A deal could serve to complicate efforts to reach a peaceful settlement by encouraging the Arabs along military lines and by further embittering the Israelis.

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The Scope of the Arms Deal

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Earlier press reports said a large number of tanks were involved, but Foreign Minister Schumann categorically denied this in his conversation of 6 January with Ambassador Shriver. Latest press reports (10 January) quote "authoritative sources" to the effect that a contract has been signed for 50 Mirage fighter bombers, and no French officials have publicly denied the stories.

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The Mirages are reportedly only one component of a broader arrangement that would also include economic, cultural, political, and other types of assistance.

The Future of the Bases

2. Foreign Minister Schumann has denied that France intends to "occupy" Wheelus or El Adem. By this, he apparently meant that the French military would not take over a base, staff it with French personnel, and run it as a French base in the manner Wheelus was run by the US. At the same time, Schumann admitted that some French technicians and instructors might be sent to Wheelus for training purposes.

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3. In addition to the negotiations with France, Libya has sought an arms agreement with West Germany, and is continuing to negotiate with the US on C-130 and F-5 contracts. In the future, therefore, it is quite possible that missions from all three nations might work at Wheelus or El Adem under Libyan authority, or that still other foreign technicians might be contracted for if any of these missions drop out.

#### French Policy

4. Since the start of negotiations with Libya, there have been internal differences within the French Government over the scope of the deal. The "architect" of the deal is reportedly Defense Minister Debre, while Foreign Minister Schumann has been opposed. Debre apparently sees the arms sale as a logical continuation of De Gaulle's policy of maintaining and developing close ties with the Arab states. He answers critics by arguing that there is no contradiction in selling arms to Libya because France's embargo policy includes only those states defined by France as belligerents in the 1967 war-- Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

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5. These internal differences are probably the explanation for the erratic manner in which the French Government has handled information on the Libyan negotiations. When the story first broke in December, French officials sought to cast doubt on the report. They then admitted that negotiations were proceeding, but continued to argue that the figures in the story were greatly exaggerated.

6. Continuing press reports of a deal prompted Schumann--in a conversation with Ambassador Shriver on 6 January--to seek to calm what was seen in Paris as US concern over the negotiations. Contrary to

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a number of press reports, Schumann did not then tell Shriver that the arms deal involved only 15 Mirages. He provided no details on the magnitude of the deal and suggested to Shriver that this was because such details were being closely held by the Defense Ministry. He did assure Shriver, however, that the US would be kept "closely and carefully informed."

7. Despite these assurances, the US Embassy in Paris was not notified prior to the press disclosure on 9 January that a contract for Mirage jet fighter bombers had been signed. In fact, on the day before the information was leaked to the press, Schumann agreed with Ambassador Shriver's comment that the conclusion of the Libyan arms arrangement should be postponed until after President Pompidou's scheduled visit to the US in late February.

8. All available evidence suggests that Pompidou has overridden any objections Schumann may have had and has given Debre the go-ahead for a sale of substantial proportions. Schumann will try to put the best face on this by arguing, as he has in the past, that the long lead time on the planes will prevent the deal from having an immediate significant impact on the Middle East balance of power. Because of the way he has been circumvented to date, however, Schumann will probably have difficulty gaining acceptance for his Middle East views in any future disputes with the Defense Ministry. This means that France is likely to go on supplying arms to Arab states such as Libya, that the present embargo on arms to Israel is likely to be continued, and that France will maintain its pro-Arab stance in diplomatic negotiations.

#### French Controls Over the Equipment and Their Effectiveness

9. Foreign Minister Schumann, in his conversations with Ambassador Shriver on 6 January, stated that France would exercise control over the use of military equipment sold to Libya through the long lead

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times required for deliveries. In addition, a Foreign Ministry official has told US Embassy officials in Paris that France will suspend deliveries of the military equipment if there is any violation of non-transfer or other restrictive clauses written into the contracts.

10. Whatever the restrictive clauses say, however, their interpretation over the next several years will probably be a matter of further bargaining. The Libyans will not want to violate them so flagrantly as to risk a cutoff of deliveries; France will be reluctant to interpret them so strictly as to jeopardize this and future deals.

11. Inasmuch as a major share of Israel's military equipment is French-built, the Arabs, particularly the Egyptians, may be at least interested in testing, examining, and familiarizing themselves with French arms. There is no evidence, however, that the Arabs now plan actually to equip Egyptian or other Arab military forces with arms purchased by Libya from France. In the event of a resumption of general Arab-Israeli hostilities, there is probably no question but that the Libyans would consider any restrictions as inoperative.

12. A French Foreign Ministry official said on 6 January that France would cut off arms deliveries to Libya if the country becomes too closely linked to Egypt. There is a growing body of information indicating that Libya has already become closely linked with Egypt.

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In short, Cairo has the ability to influence the weak Libyan regime significantly or even to control it for a time by bringing in sufficient military forces. So

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far, however, the evidence of this increasingly close relationship has apparently not influenced the French decision to go ahead with an arms deal.

General Impact in the Middle East

13. The Arab states in general, barring the Maghreb countries, would be interested in encouraging arms deals between France and Libya. The acquisition of French materiel would allow the Libyans to release to needy Arab states the limited quantity of equipment and arms they have on hand from the US and UK.

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14. By and large, the Arab states have as much military equipment as they are capable of using effectively. The present Libyan armed forces are able only to provide some degree of internal security, and would require years of intensive training before they could utilize any quantity of sophisticated modern weapons or aircraft. Most Arabs believe as an article of faith, however, that if they acquire enough modern military hardware they will become the equals of Israel and that it is impossible for any Arab nation to have too many weapons (although Arab leaders, particularly Nasir and Husayn, realize the falsity of this belief). The fact that the Israelis use French arms gives these weapons an additional cachet of excellence in Arab eyes, and they regard it as a diplomatic coup that Israel's former main supplier now supplies the Arab armies instead.

15. In the final analysis, however, the additional input of even millions of dollars' worth of modern weapons to Libya will not alter the actual balance of military strength in the Middle East over the next several years. There may even be a net gain for the West if France becomes a major arms supplier to Libya and if this precludes Soviet arms sales there. The French-Libyan arms deal could, however, encourage the Arabs to make further military efforts, particularly if there seems to be a chance that the scale of

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the deal will increase; this prospect will lessen their interest in seeking a peaceful settlement. The Israelis will almost certainly be further embittered, and could use the deal to exert more pressure on the US for additional arms.

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